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ABSTRACT

The document presents ten interviews with ethnically diverse Bostonian immigrants who have been long-time residents of their communities. It is part of the 1978-79 Ethnic Heritage Project for Boston Youth, designed for secondary students. Oral history is used to help students gain an understanding of the development of urban-ethnic neighborhoods in Boston. The interviews are arranged in five sections of two interviews each. An introduction contains historical and cultural background material. Interviewees' ages range from 60 to 98. Section I discusses Boston's Chinese community and focuses on everyday life, politics, employment, and personal immigration history. Section II concentrates on the early Irish American community of Dorchester, particularly the education and religion. Section III deals with the black church in Boston and the interviewees' church-community life. Section IV discusses various groups in East Boston and includes an interview with an Italian American woman and a Spanish American man. Topics include religion, social life, and family life. The final chapter covers Boston's early Jewish community. Interviewees discuss their immigration and the importance of the synagogues. (CK)

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A DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST

ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNTS of Boston's Ethnic Neighborhoods and People

The Ethnic Heritage Studies Project for Boston Youth
1978-79

SP 012 196

Education Development Center
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02160

Robert C. Hayden
Editor

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years enrollment in history courses has declined sharply. In part this decline may reflect the need students feel for practical, useful knowledge that will help them start careers. The decline, too, may be laid on the way history has been traditionally taught and studied.

One way to keep history interesting is to focus directly on human beings. A method of doing historical studies this way is **oral history**. It involves direct personal contact with people. Oral history can be defined as the recording of information in the form of recollections of the past by a person with first hand knowledge.

History can be thought of as a dialogue with the past. It should not be just the history of **the few**, but the history of **the many**. The great events in American history involved not only leaders but also had an enormous impact on the masses of nameless people. We need to understand those events of the past, local as well as national, as experienced by the wider segment of the population that has not been previously thought worthwhile to record and preserve.

The **Ethnic Heritage Studies Project for Boston Youth** was designed to use oral history in gaining some ethnic historical heritage from "the common people."

Irish-American, Italian-American, Black-American, Puerto Rican, Chinese-American and Jewish teenagers in Boston talked with "everyday" people who have been long-time residents in their communities and who remember the past. Together these teenagers and older citizens have produced a "peoples' history" of their own communities.

These recollections and stories are vital to an understanding of the development of the urban-ethnic neighborhoods in Boston of the past, and of the present and future.

ETHNIC HERITAGE STUDIES PROJECT

The **Ethnic Heritage Studies Project** was designed and implemented by working with churches and other community-based agencies in Boston.

The objectives of the project were:

- to enable teenagers in the City of Boston to learn about the nature of their ethnic group heritage.
- to provide an opportunity for youth from different ethnic groups to share with each other their individual ethnicity.
- to give youth an understanding and appreciation of their ethnic group's contribution to community development.
- to develop a **model** for inter-ethnic group learning and communication that can be replicated.

In studying their respective ethnic groups, the students between the ages of 13 and 18 used several methods: oral history, the collection and study of old photographs and objects from the material culture, and primary and secondary written materials.

From the photographic records, gained in most cases from the people interviewed, slides were made for visual presentations.

In June of 1979 the visual and oral history material was used to prepare a half-hour television program at Channel 4-WBZ in Boston. Two teenagers from each ethnic group appeared on the show to share their information and experiences from the project with the Greater Boston viewing audience. This booklet represents another way of disseminating the results of the project.

It is hoped that this initial effort will be "the seed" for the development of ethnic museum-resource centers in the churches and agencies that participated.

This twelve-month project was supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Health, Education, and Welfare and a supporting grant from The Peter Strauss Trust at the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, Boston, Mass.

BOSTON'S CHINESE COMMUNITY

Boston's Chinese community is one of the City's least known, yet one of the City's oldest ethnic populations.

The first Chinese began to arrive in Boston in 1875, twenty-five years after the initial wave of emigration to California. Those who arrived in California in the mid-1800's came almost as "slaves" to build the railroads. After 1869, with the completion of the transcontinental link, there was much anti-Chinese feeling and further employment was closed to them. Jobless Chinese began to shift to the big cities of the East Coast. Those who first came to this area came to break a shoe factory strike in western Massachusetts. When the strike ended they shifted to Boston.

By 1890 a small Chinese neighborhood was established in the Oxford Street area. They numbered about 150 and had come to the United States by way of California, where they provided a large labor force for the construction of the western railroads. The Chinese who migrated to Boston in this early period came by railroad and settled in the South Cove area adjacent to the railroad terminal which is today still the center of Boston Chinatown. In 1910 there were only 900 in Chinatown and by 1940, only 1,300. After 1945, Boston's Chinese community began to grow at a faster rate than before, increasing to 2,000 in 1950 and to nearly 8,000 by 1970. Boston has the fourth largest Chinese community in the United States.

Most of the early history of Chinese-Americans written so far (and there has not been too much) presents only the superstructure of the Chinese community in America. The materials that historians, sociologists and popular writers use are chiefly those recorded by Chinese diplomats and students who only stayed briefly in the United States. Their viewpoints and experiences are surely invaluable, yet perhaps, one-sided. The vast majority of Chinese who migrated here in the early days were laborers. They came here to toil to provide security for their families in China. Their difficulties, frustrations and life-style therefore represent the real experience of the Chinese masses in this country.

MR. PHILIP CHIN
Age 60

I came to the United States in 1938 and my wife came in 1948. We came from Shiu Lam, a village in the district of Taisan of Kuangtung province. Most of the first generation Chinese here were from Taisan.

When I first arrived here I worked in my father's laundry in Cambridge. At that time we charged thirteen cents for washing a shirt and twenty-five cents for a pair of pants. Compared to other laundrymen, we were better off because they usually sent out the clothes to a factory to get cleaned.

The clothes were put into a special kind of water, and then they went through a machine to extract the excess starch water. In the beginning, the laundry people had to use the old fashioned iron which was put into a furnace with coal to get hot. Later when the electric appliances became accessible, we used the electric iron to press shirts.

But there was no automatic shut off for the early electric iron; quite a few people forgot to turn the iron off and it led to having their whole laundry burned down. In those days, the income for the laundry was about sixty dollars a month. We never increased the price for these services. At the present day laundry, the lowest cost for a shirt is fifty cents or seventy-five cents; however, none now ever use the hand wash method in the laundry any longer, for everything is substituted by machine.

The laundry was a family enterprise. The whole family worked for long hours. We woke up at six o'clock and finished working at ten o'clock in the evening.

By 1951, we were able to own a car, with which we visited beaches, parks, and New York. I learned how to develop and process photos so we took a lot of photos.

There were no other Chinese families in our neighborhood. Being Chinese, we experienced great frustrations and problems in purchasing a house. People simply refused to sell houses to Chinese, who were thought unclean. Some Chinese people would go to a real estate agent and let the Caucasian buy the house for them. They did not dare to go to look at the house in which they were about to live. Sometimes Chinese were forced to move out of the house they already lived in, by the owner. The reason was the older generation of the Caucasians really discriminated against the foreigners. The younger generation did not mistreat Chinese as badly as the old. Only in the last decade, has the American public began to accept Chinese as their own equals.

In the early days, there were some white kids who would come to our laundry everyday, and tease us about our teeth. The kids would yell from the street that Chinese were not clean . . . they did not brush their teeth or take a bath. Finally, one day one of the workers chased after the kids and punched the one so hard to make sure that he would not come again. Some Chinese did not resist . . . they simply tried to ignore this kind of discrimination, prejudice or name calling. Yet some would hit back when it was reasonable for self-defense. The policemen never interfered with such a self-defense fight for the discriminating part was wrong.

Most of the early Chinese immigrants ran a laundry business, because they did not know the language, nor would the white people hire them for any other work.

My father owned a laundry shop ever since 1923, so I simply carried on the business as a family business. Laundry meant hard labor, but we were not educated for any other trade. Even the older Chinese did not regard their laundry business highly; they would not even tell their relatives back in China about their leading a life as laundry workers in the United States. The older generation worked hard day and night in order to save enough money to go home. But some gambled on their way home in the ship and lost all their belongings, so that they had to take the next ship back to San Francisco. Without success in career or business, Chinese dared not face their relatives at home.

The most common family names were Chin and Wong. When people of the same family name and of the same village came to Boston, they lived together in one apartment. The apartments separated by the family names then became the gathering place and they were called Gong-si Fangs.

People could rent rooms. They gathered every Sunday to chat about the past or to exchange their present living and working experiences. People belonging to a Gong-si Fang would contribute some money to it for the rent and food. Yet people who worked at the laundry slept in the shop. After work they opened up their cots in the night or slept on the ironing board.

In 1948, there were only four grocery stores in Chinatown. The streets were not as busy as they are now. The busy streets then were Beach Street, Taylor Street, and Hudson Street. In the old days, the only existing restaurant was The Hung Far Lau. The food served then was just horrible, and nothing about the restaurant was attractive at all. There were no fancy dishes and there were only some dry short noodles covered with bamboo shoots, bean sprouts and meat–similar to what is known now as the chop suey and chow mein. Food in Chinese restaurants was improved only in these past five years.

The oldest grocery store–Dong Chang-Loong which has existed for 50 or 60 years and had two owners . . . first owned by Ng and now owned by the Wongs . . . used to sell some pastry called chi. Though Chinese New Year or August Moon festivals were not celebrated extensively as it is now, people then also made "jong-tse"–the special kind of sticky rice pastry for the May Fifth Dragon Boat Festival to celebrate the famous patriotic ancient Chinese poet–Chu Yuan. The parades were not grand as they are now. My son often begged to have the chance to hold the lion in the celebration during his growing years.

Chinese in Boston were friendlier than they are to each other now. People used to greet each other down the street, exchanged the last names, inquired about their origin, and chatted for a while. Chinese people are less together now ever since the coming over of the family–wife and children–after the second World War. Everyone since then has his family to attend to. Before the families came, Chinese got to gather after work and their popular past-time was gambling. There were more gambling joints than there are now. After the World War II, the family demanded care and people were drawn

away from Chinatown. Fewer people stayed hanging around those gambling joints. People in Chinatown unofficially formed separate parties–On Leung and Hip-Sing, for example were the most powerful ones. On Leung actually encouraged and stood behind a lot of those old gambling joints and blackmailed the policemen to avoid the gambling arrests.

On Leung and Hip-Sing were originally two parties to protect the well being of Chinatown. They became so powerful and actually controlled business in Chinatown. People belonging to the two different organizations had become rivals and competitors. Before 1948, the two parties got into constant conflicts and fights, which often resulted in death of some people who refused to cooperate or to submit to the power of the established business down the street. Though both gangsters of the two groups owned guns and killed people easily, the police never interfered as they called this strife "Tong War"–the fight was only among Chinese themselves.

After World War II, the power of Hip-Sing dwindled in size. On Leung became more powerful than ever. However, after the War, there were fewer physical combats, but there were more formal and civilized discussions and conferences. On Leung seemed to have more interest in setting up gambling joints in Chinatown than in caring for controlling people's lives.

In the early part of the century, only people who had birth certificates could apply to stay in the U.S. If a man returned to China for a while and had a son born to him . . . when the man came back to the U.S., he could apply for his son and bring him to the States. But in the beginning, women–wife and daughters–could not come. Sometimes, when a man wanted to bring some other man to the States, he would take a trip home and reported that one or two children were born unto him and sold the birth certificate for $2,000 to the man who wished to come over. The man in turn would pretend to be his son. Yet the immigration office also invented the counter measures–people who applied to immigrate had to memorize and to be tested almost on a magazine-thick size of information to make sure they match the right information handed to the Immigration Office. At the first port–Chinese usually came by San Francisco–they had to stay there until the immigration officers were convinced that the newcomer was a real relative to the sponsor in the States. Some were so nervous or forgetful, they might make a few mistakes and they had to stay at the Immigration Office until the officers were satisfied.

Many who were real relatives of the host and were suspected as false would be sent back to China. Some Chinese would even try to bribe the officers to see if they could avoid the interview which was nerve-wracking. However the officers were very strict, and also they really discriminated against Chinese immigrants. Nevertheless, after the World War II, when my wife came, she did not have to stay too long in the Immigration Office, because I just returned from the War.

Many had to sleep in a big room with cots and ate only rice porridge. There were people who had to stay there for five months and they were not allowed to send letters or have any communication with any of the people outside. It was a terrible experience . . . especially for those real relatives who were so scared that they were confused and they mixed up some of their family information and were deported back to China or Hong Kong. Among those investigation questions, the assumed sons

were asked about the color of the kitchen cabinet, or how many bowls did the family have, the number of brothers and sisters in the father's family. However, there was a vicious circle, the more strict immigration regulations were, the more tricky and false statements from the applicants would there be. As the birth certificate cost about $2,000, the consequence was the creation of the Chinese paper-family.

Prior to the 1960's Chinese women never did go out of the house to work. My wife went to work in a factory in 1965, when our children grew up. She learned sewing before coming to the States. So she helped at the laundry while taking care of the children at home. As women started to work outside they could earn money.

In the early days, the U.S. Government did not give any right or benefit for Chinese. Chinese had to work very hard to survive. Chinese did not gain any right until the little City Hall of Chinatown was set up by people as Peter Chen. There were also two other forces to procure equal rights. One was by the Senator, Mr. Fong who was of Chinese origin and the other was by people who came from Hong Kong and lived in the ghetto who decided to fight for their rights. Th struggles and campaigns for black rights in the late 1960's have also won equality for Chinese and all other Asians. The advantages for Chinese were due to the fact people preferred to hire Chinese to the black, or Chinese were harder workers. The affirmative action programs brought better opportunities for Chinese to have jobs and to attend schools. Compared to the early days when one had to pay money to learn English language, now one can receive scholarship or grant to go to school. Now Chinese have entered into all different fields of professions and jobs. One day in the future, Chinese born in the States can run for the national presidency of the United States as well.

Presently, there are Chinese who now live in the suburban areas, and affluent in living and fluent in English language, but they would not understand the problems of Chinatown, nor can they identify themselves with the people in Chinatown. Now the immediate need is to unite the forces of all Chinese communities.

REV. PETER Y.F. SHIH

Age 75

I have been teaching and preaching a long time. I started preaching back in China when I was still a student in the theology school . . . got a call to be a guest preacher from a very large church. . . . They liked me and asked me to preach again two weeks later . . .then I was invited to be a minister there even two weeks before I finished school . . . my major job was to preach.

I stayed at this church for three and a half years. . . . They built a new church, the largest in East China.

Then the theological school board decided for me to return to teach. . . . The church was nice to release me . . . I was the first Chinese teacher to be called back to teach. . . . Western missionaries had been my teachers . . . I have about 500 ministers in China today who were my students. I was teacher and dean for 14 years. Sooner or later I will be returning to China. And I want to see how many of them are still living and what they have done.

When and how did you happen to come to Boston?

I was a theological teacher and Dean in 1947 . . . I taught Old Testament. In 1947 the National Council of Churches set up a good will mission to this country . . . and I was asked to be the chairman of the delegation. . . . So I came over here . . . and I guess it was in August of 1947, we were assigned to come to Old South Church in Boston to have two meetings. After the second meeting one of the ministers said, "We have a Chinese mission in Chinatown for 50 years. . . . The mission was closed for six or seven months due to lack of leadership and also financial difficulties. . . . Would someone in this delegation be interested to stay here and start the mission again?" . . . I was the only preacher . . . they looked at me. If they needed someone to start a church, I was the only one able to do it, . . . I thought it over for two months . . . the Theological Seminary had agreed to release me. . . . So I came here at the end of October and preached on the first Sunday of November in 1947. And my wife and son arrived here three days before Christmas.

And the mission center has a little house like this parsonage. You see the parking lot? Formerly there were four houses there. They were burned down. The mission was in the second house. The rent was $200 a month. When I got here I found the place was about $7,000 in debt. The place was running down. We lived on the third floor. There was no water on the third floor. A black woman was living there as the housekeeper.

The first Sunday in November, 15 people showed up for the service, including one Caucasian—a Methodist on the board of missions. We borrowed the ping-pong room at the next door YMCA for worship. There was no place to worship in our own place. Formerly before I came here, there was no church. Just teaching English, and helping people. It was a mission center rather than a church. Somehow, I said that we had to have a spot to worship. In fact Sunday School didn't really start till 1948. So we didn't have Sunday School for a while. . . . I didn't speak the local dialect, so I preached in English and I had someone interpret my message into Cantonese. The offering was $4.37.

Life was very hard for the Chinese people in Boston. . . I preached every Sunday in some American church. My wife would read the scripture and our son David would sing a little Chinese song.

Our own worship service was at 4:00 p.m. every Sunday. . . and also we renovated part of the mission house. We used the second floor, removing a partition and making a big room. We called it the "Upper Room." We used it for worship so we didn't have to use the YMCA ping-pong room. Then in the fifth year we raised enough money to change the heating system. . . . Then gradually we bought the second house, the third house, and the fourth house, until we bought the whole block. Then seven years later we built a small chapel. It had a seating capacity of 160 people, very comfortable. Then 11 years later it was burned down with four other houses.

What caused the fire?

One of our refugee families—we have helped more than 1500 refugees coming over to this country—that is one of the great works of this church. . . . One of the families living in the fourth house . . . didn't know how to use the gas stove . . . some hot oil spilled, caught fire and went up the ceiling. No lives were lost. We had altogether 37 people living in our church housing.

How did you help these people?

Usually they all have some relatives here. What they need the church for is to find some American to sponsor them. I do all the paper work for them . . . the immigration office has confidence in us. . . . We do the same thing now with the "Boat People" from Vietnam. There are still people coming . . . just today I got 6—7 calls. . . . Sometimes you don't know what happens with those refugee children . . . they became doctors, lawyers. When I had my eyes examined the doctor looked familiar. . . I asked if I met him before and he say, "Of course, I was one of your kids 30 years ago." This country is really a great country . . . a great opportunity, if you work hard.

What else do you recall about your ministry in Chinatown?

. . . I am a very strong man. I never compromise. When I first came to Chinatown, I saw one of the worst evils was gambling. We had a laundry man just opposite here. The Chinese New Year, the first one for me in this country, he started to gamble and he was lucky. Nearly every night for two weeks he won some money. He had nearly forty thousand dollars. At that time Communists didn't occupy Canton. For two or three months before my family arrive I took my shirts and everything. We got along very well. He said he was going back to Canton. This was my lucky year. I said that he better stop. Gambling is no good. He continued to gamble and finally he lost every penny, even his savings in the bank. He was about 60 years old, all alone. He died without ever seeing his family. I know so many stories in the last 30 years about the evil of gambling. When I go out speaking, on top of my preaching on Sundays, I'd speak five or six times a week at schools and places, I have never preached on gambling in Chinatown. But during the question and answer period, when they asked questions about gambling—as a minister I cannot say there is no gambling. As a minister I cannot say I don't know about it. Then in the audience are people who think I shouldn't be so straight forward. They have friends in Chinatown, gambling friends and to have the minister condemn them severly . . . Chinatown people didn't like that.

But as a minister, even if you were a gambler, I help you. You are a child of God. Sometimes in my own church I preach on the evil of gambling to save the second generation, the third generation from going into that evil. This is my mission . . . I do not compromise. . . .

Tell me more about your church services?

Our morning service is usually in Cantonese for those who don't understand English. . . . Five years ago we had evening service too. The evening service was always larger . . . because we had visiting groups. It was a three-hour program. From 6 to 7, question and answer period; from 7 to 8, Chinese supper and from 8 to 9, worship.

. . . Well I did much social work, such as the day care center and youth counseling work . . . are still carried on here in Chinatown at our Mission Center, but our place of worship is now in Brookline. Most of our members live outside Chinatown . . . only about fifteen percent from Chinatown. There are 4,000 Chinese in Brookline and another 5,000 in Brighton and Allston . . . all within a two-mile radius from our church building, the Chinese Christian Church of New England.

My son David is also a minister . . . he teaches school mostly. He usually preaches twice a month . . . and I preach twice. I hope and dream that some day we will find somebody to work with David.

My son David will become senior pastor in July . . . I will be the advisory pastor. And when David has a co-pastor, I will be the pastor emeritus . . . gradually going out. . . . He's continued my work . . . he was one of the founders of the Golden Age Center, Chinese and bi-lingual education, and the Chinese multi-service center. . . . I believe if you can do something good for people—that is part of the church work. . . .

THE EARLY IRISH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF DORCHESTER

Until the mid-nineteenth century, Dorchester was a self sufficient Yankee community. The coming of the railroad marked the beginning of the end of Dorchester's independence. Railroad tracks were built over Dorchester marshland and the area became a metropolitan suburb accessible to Bostonians.

By 1875 thousands of immigrants, a large portion of them Irish were filling up Boston. Older Boston families sought to escape the overcrowding in the center city. Moving to Dorchester was the answer—green lawns and open space. The Irish could not afford to live there. They stayed in Boston where they took over politics from the old Yankee establishment.

Dorchester annexed itself to Boston in 1869. After annexation, Dorchester multiplied in population as new trolley and subway lines made even the more distant section an easy commute from the city.

The second generation Americans who moved into Dorchester's two- and three-family homes at the beginning of the 1900's were mostly Irish. They almost entirely displaced the older Yankee families.

Catholicity kept pace with this expansion of the Irish population in Dorchester. In the mid 1850's those few Catholics in Dorchester travelled to parishes in South Boston, W. Quincy, Milton, and Roxbury. For a while Mass was celebrated in small halls located on the site of the Walter Baker Chocolate Company.

In 1863, Rt. Rev. John B. Fitzpatrick, Bishop of Boston, laid the cornerstone for St. Gregory's Church—Dorchester's first Catholic church. Lightning struck the church in 1878 destroying its 130 foot tower. Reconstruction completed by 1894 enlarged St. Gregory's to seat 1,100 members. In 1915, ninety-five children were enrolled in St. Gregory's School and in 1923 St. Gregory's High School was opened to take the first graduates from the elementary school.

St. Gregory's School exists today opposite the original church building. Some of its students participated in studying their community's past through the Ethnic Heritage Studies Project.

John Walsh (age 83) and Richard McGivern (age 70) long-time residents of the Dorchester area shared with the students their lives, people they remember, the church, and their neighborhood life as they remembered it.

MR. RICHARD McGIVERN
Age 70

Can you tell me about your early education?

I was in the second graduating class from St. Gregory's Grammar School in 1924. Well, I entered the first grade there. I think they started the school with a first grade and second grade, a first and second grade for boys, a first and second grade for girls. I finished with interruptions for sickness in 1924. Within the past year I've talked with two other graduates of that graduating class, one calls me up now and then.

After St. Gregory's I then went to Boston College High until 1928. We just had our 50th reunion. I then went to Boston College, and I've just recently retired from teaching in the Boston school system.

What are some of your earliest recollections about St. Gregory's?

Well, it was only the two grades in the beginning and the boys and girls weren't even allowed to talk to one another. The basement impressed me. As I recall it, the boys room was where it is today, as was the girls room and boiler room. But there was nothing else here in the basement, absolutely nothing.

The corridors were bare when we started. As the grades progressed they added a grade every year. So the next year it went up to grade 3, the next, grade 4, and so on. Monsignor Dolan was the Pastor.

If we were early to school we would go outside and watch the street cars come in because the four nuns, and later more, all came to the school from St. Peter and St. Paul in South Boston. We felt very proud of ourselves when we could read the signs on the streetcars and tell whether they came from Broadway or Dudley Street.

As the school grew and there were more nuns, the convent was put up. I don't remember when that was.

I lived at the other end of the Parish. We had two sessions. Now you stay for lunch, but we had two sessions. Well, that's about my education.

What were classes like?

The classes were very hard. The rooms were very crowded. I just spoke to one nun who said when she taught at St. Gregory's, there were 65 in one room. The nuns were very strict but they had to be if there was any problem . . . the nuns were boss. No parent dared argue with a nun. Msgr. Dolan used to drop in once in a while. He was the final arbitrator of everything. We would quote "The Monsignor says . . ." and that would be the end of all discussion.

What about other priests?

Well, Francis X. Dolan, the Monsignor, was a brilliant man. He'd come up and see me sometimes when I was sick. He was the only one I can remember. The priests were not very

friendly, . . . you couldn't get close to them. Today I call many priests by their first names, but not then, they kept their distance.

The parish house was beside the church on a lot beside St. Gregory Court. It was a large three story house. There was a passage from the house into the steps going down into the lower church so the priests could come in without having to go outside in bad weather. On the other side of the church was a three or six family house. Dr. MacSweeny used to live there. Mike Donlan was the caretaker-custodian. He did everything. He took care of that house (which the church owned), the church, the rectory, the school; he was the only caretaker I knew of then.

Was the Carney Hospital there at that time?

No, at the Carney was the estate of Judge Churchill, I think he was a Superior Court judge. It was a large house, right at the corner of Dorchester Park.

To get back to the Monsignor, do you remember what kind of speaker he was? Did he have good sermons?

I don't remember too well, I don't suppose I paid much attention to sermons. One other priest we had there, the curate at the home on River Street, he'd give thundering sermons. Monsignor Dolan, all I remember about his was that they were long; there was no such thing as seven minute sermons. Mass was at least an hour.

Of course everytime you wanted to receive communion you had to go to confession the day before. And you had to fast from midnight the night before. It was a problem for me because I was sick many times. Also it took me fifteen minutes to walk to church and fifteen minutes back. Along with the hour for Mass, it was a long time to go without eating.

Can we go back to the school? Is there anything you'd like to add?

Well, in school we had none of these frills or extras, no library, no nurse. I remember when the Shick Test came out for Diptheria, they took us out into the corridors and gave us a needle. The superior (principal today) was Sister Clautilda. She was a brilliant woman.

Well Sister was in total charge. . . she was the complete boss. All meetings and plays were held in the first floor corridors.

How long was school then?

We got out at 3:30 p.m. It started about quarter to nine. We had an hour for lunch. We had a recess. On my memories . . . we had no extras like art. I remember in reading I would always hope the nun would call on me. I was a good reader, but it was boring. In math all we did was learn tables, 4 x 5 = 20; 4 x 6 = 24; and so on and on, no new math, no shortcuts, just memorization. I remember I was sick most of the eight grade and I went to school in January and went half days until about April.

What if you got hurt?

You go to the Sister Superior. There was no one else.

Did you have any other subjects here?

We had plays, around Christmas . . . there was no science, no music. It was all meat and potatoes. It was very boring but I think we got more out of it then you do today.

Do you remember anything about the area around St. Gregory's?

Oh, heavens, opposite the Carney Hospital where the apartment house is now was an empty field. And I have warm, vivid memories about sunny days and warm days. When we got out at noon time we'd turn stones over there and I'd try to get snakes.

The streetcars came out Dorchester Avenue from Broadway. The subway wasn't extended until later. There were steam trains, they stopped at Ashmont and again on the other side of the river. Originally I remember streetcars going down Washington Street to Lower Mills, there was a car barn at Lower Mills. There used to be a big terminal there. Later instead of going down Washington Street, they'd go down Gallivan Boulevard, which was then called Codman Street.

The Home for Incurables . . . the entrance was further up. The original building was a massive three story wood building. On the other side, going towards Boston, was all fields. We used to coast on it. Home field, we called it. There was a mound with a sewer cover. We'd take the top off . . . you could walk almost all the way to Neponset. I remember around supper time you'd see someone going in to call their brother, and the sewer would reverberate. . .

At the top of the hill there was a stone wall and in back was another field, Gushy's farm was part of it. Gush had another farm somewhere south of Boston. There were cows grazing. Still further behind there was another field with a gully, we used to go skiing there.

Further up the top of Codman Hill was the Codman Mansion. One night it burned down and made a massive bonfire. I was very young then. Going down from the hill to Milton Lower Mills there was a hill with a ski jump built by some Norwegian man. There weren't many houses the other side of St. Gregory's.

Do you remember the area around Baker's Chocolate?

Well, that hasn't changed much. But I do remember on certain days when we'd have what the workmen would call a low. You could smell chocolate all the way to Ashmont. I know when we could smell it we'd know it was going to rain. I don't remember too much about the Baker Company, the library was always where it was. I remember going to it.

Did you ever go into the Baker's buildings?

Just once for a cup of cocoa and I remember saying to myself that this must have been Mr. Baker's office.

We used to go skating on the Neponset River and I remember swimming in those muddy inlets. We didn't have bathing suits then and our clothes would get all dirty when we came out. I can remember in my fourth grade a boy named John Woods fell through the ice one winter. That is vivid.

How did you get around?

Well I walked back and forth to school, everyone walked. I remember when we'd visit churches we'd walk all the way into South Boston.

When we first had a cottage at Hough's Neck my mother would borrow a horse and team and put all the bedding and things and go to the cottage. That was a long ride, the horses didn't travel very fast. I only rode a street car for the first time when I went to the hospital. Autos were a rarity . . . if a plane flew by everyone would be out of their house to look.

Did you have any jobs when you were young?

Oh, my oldest brother would build the fire in the stove, he'd shake it down and put in paper and wood. You'd pour coal on it. We'd have coal in the cellar. We'd bank it. When the ashes were left, we'd shovel them out and pick out any cinders and save them. We'd pour the barrels of ashes out every week. You could buy coal by the bag if you didn't have it delivered.

Do you remember any parades, Dorchester Day?

Well, I don't because we went away in the summer. I remember going into town to the Armistice Parade at the end of World War I. We didn't get to parades much. The St. Patrick's Day Parade in South Boston we went to a few times.

Were there many farms?

Yes, there was much farming. At the top of Fuller Street there was the one I mentioned. Some of us kids would dig up a potato now and then and roast it, but the skin would be so charred you might not be able to eat it. We'd steal a turnip or an ear of corn. Some kids got jobs at Gushy's.

I'll tell you a little about the area. Men rode around in wagons delivering things with their teams of horses, the streets were all dirt. After a storm they would be mud, all puddles, there were no curbings. At my house on Clermont Street, I don't even remember heat in the house. We had a couple of stoves. There was no heat upstairs, none at all.

You said that the streets were all dirt, even Dorchester Avenue?

No, they had some paving, because the streetcar tracks ran along it, but all the side streets had no paving at all. I can remember the first cars trying to go through streets with the mud literally up to the hubcaps. Those were the kinds of roads we had. They had to pave roads I guess to suit the automobile. But when we got off our front step we were right in the middle of a dirt road, no sidewalk, no curbings. This was all about 1914–19.

Cars were a rarity. The vegetable man, and the ice man would all come along in their horse-drawn wagons. They'd have a sign on the side telling how much you'd get and how much it would cost. You'd put a card in your window that would say 10, 15, 40, 100 lbs. of ice. They would bring them into the icebox which was kept in the pantry, because the pantries were cold; they had a drip pan under them which you'd have to dump every day . . . no hot water.

There were rag men who'd buy rags and empty bottles, papers, scrap metal. They were all delivered by horses. The milk truck bottles would rattle. All these men were out everyday.

No hot water?

No, hot water came later . . . we'd wash with ice cold water first thing in the morning. I remember my father was a plumber. He'd go out at five or six in the morning to take care of frozen pipes in the cellars; there was no central heating. All we had was a stove upstairs in the kitchen and a little stove in the parlor, nothing in the cellar at all which meant the cellar could freeze up easily.

What about for your bedroom?

Oh just blankets, blankets galore, that's why when you see old T.V. programs they wore stocking caps to keep warm. Canopies over beds were for the same reason. I remember wearing stocking caps to bed. We'd keep the stove going all night. My oldest brother would have the job to shake down the stove, put the ashes out, then start the fire. There was a grate which the ashes would fall through, then he'd put new coals in; then put wood and coal on. We didn't have oil for a long time.

What about electricity?

Oh, I remember when that was being put in. Before that I remember doing homework by gaslight. Playing cards, the whole family would sit around the gaslights.

Was there Little League Baseball?

No, there was no Little League. The Codman Club was an older team. Young people would just pick up a bat and make sides if they wanted to play baseball. We'd use bricks for bases. The older fellows who played would pass the hat. The Codman team would do it. Gloves, balls, bats, not everyone had them. Even books were a rarity. If you went to the library you'd have to read some there. Books were expensive. The ball team was for 17 and 18 year old kids. My father used to referee. I remember he'd get up at 7:00, drink a glass of milk, break a raw egg and drink that. He wouldn't get home till 7 or 8 at night. These men worked hard then. Firemen never got home. They'd see their families once a week. The kids didn't know them. You'd work dawn to dusk. It was hard work.

What about pay?

I remember the headlines in 1916, three inch headlines, when Henry Ford raised the wages to five dollars a day. Imagine that, five dollars a day! That was good money then, it was double what most people were getting. People get more than that an hour now.

What were some childhood diseases?

Scarlet Fever, it was contagious. They would have to quarantine people. For things like measles, mumps, if one kid got it mothers would expose the others so everyone could get it at once. I had diptheria. I had pneumonia, I had everything. I probably had a mild case

of polio but never developed into anything serious. Influenza epidemics–would get the big bushy men; I think it was in 1916 there was a big epidemic. That's enough for diseases. When you needed a doctor, you went down to the doctor's house. You'd try all the doctors' homes until you found one home. If you could call them, they'd have a horse and buggy, that was Dr. O'Brien, he'd come over on house calls. Doctors just worked from dawn to dusk– they couldn't get away.

If you needed an operation, how would they "knock you out?"

They'd put ether on a cloth, and have you breathe it in and it would gradually put you out.

I remember my appendix broke, so all the infection went through my body. They cut me on the stomach to drain all the infection. Every day for three weeks that was all they could do– roll me over every day and drain the poison out with a syringe. Today they'd just give you penicillin or some other antibiotic.

What about your spare time. What did you do for fun?

I remember our first radio . . . a crystal radio. On the radio would be a small mike with a hair. You'd move the hair along until you'd pick up a radio station. We'd take turns listening for five minutes or so.

About the gas in the homes, wasn't it dangerous?

There was only a few lights, the gas was low. We had kerosene lamps for the other rooms. There was no heat in St. Gregory's Church you know. I don't remember how we kept warm. The churches in town had those foot warmers, but we didn't. The high school was built just when I was graduating grade 8. The whole building was heated by gas, they must have been the biggest consumer in the area.

This church incidentally was the first in Dorchester. I was in the first graduating class, boys and girls were separate. We couldn't even talk to them. Monsignor Dolan made sure of that. Even in high school the girls weren't allowed to date. They would be expelled if he found out. I never could figure out how the church expected you to get married young if you couldn't have anything to do with girls.

MR. JOHN WALSH
Age 82

There was a fire house in the area—right next to my house—Engine 16, ladder 6, . . . it was horse drawn. When they went out I would go into the firehouse and close the doors for them. Inside there was a rod they pulled when there was a fire and the horses would come running out and the firemen would hitch them up—three on the engine and two on the hose wagon.

I remember a man who took care of those horses. He'd run them up and down River Street and jump on and off, just like in the cavalry.

I remember I sold papers. They were one cent apiece. If I sold 100 I'd make twenty-five cents. I had to get out at 5:00 a.m., where the Milton Station is today. The steam trains used to run and the rich people used to come down there. They'd get off and they'd buy the paper. Most of them were Republicans and they'd buy the *Herald.*

Two or three times a week there was a paper called *The Transcript*; it was like the *Wall Street Journal.* It cost three cents. Only the rich would buy it.

How far did your twenty-five cents go then ?

It went a long way. You could buy a stick of candy for a penny. I remember my father worked seven days a week for Kidder-Peabody and got sixty dollars a month. He was a gardener. He'd milk the cows and take care of the grounds. He also got three quarts of milk a day. I've seen times when sixty dollars would not even pay our grocery bill. He paid ten dollars a month rent, coal was five dollars a ton.

Where did you go to school?

First I went to school where the Knights of Columbus building is now. It was called the Stoughton School. After third grade you went to the Gilbert Stuart. It went to grade nine. Boys and girls were mixed in one room. There were about 35 to a classroom. They had discipline. You got the rataan if you got out of line. I graduated from there in 1910. Then I went to Dorchester High for two years. Then I quit and went to work. I used to drive a produce wagon. We put the wagon where St. Gregory's auditorium is now. There used to be a stable there. We'd sell vegetables Monday through Thursday; fish on Friday. Saturdays we'd sell only vegetables. In the summer we'd sell fresh peaches, strawberries. We'd even sell mackeral—five for twenty-five cents in a tin. We'd sell haddock for nine cents. We'd buy it for three cents a pound. I'd drive the horse and wagon over to the fish pier . . . we'd scrape fish and take it home. Thursday afternoon and Friday we'd sell fish. There was a good profit in fish.

How did you keep it fresh?

It was iced. You couldn't let it go stale. You could tell it was stale by looking under the gill. If it was purple it was fresh. We'd also sell potatoes by the peck . . . 15 pounds of potatoes was

a peck. Twelve pounds of apples was a peck. Today nobody knows what a peck is. Or bushels for that matter. Years ago that's how we brought stuff. There was no pound of this or half-pound of that.

When you graduated from grammar school did you get a diploma?

Yes, or you couldn't go to high school. In those days the poorer kids didn't go to high school, they had to work. Their people needed the money. When you got a diploma from grammar school then you knew something.

Did you ever go to St. Gregory's Sunday School?

Well, I was baptized in St. Gregory's. I can remember First Communion. I went to Mass on Sundays. You had to. They put the fear of God in you. I remember Father Heaney . . . me and another boy assisted at Mass. Then it was all in Latin. Well, Father Heaney didn't like the way we pronounced our words and kept us after Mass to say it for him. Father Heaney would hit you in a minute. He'd go out into the neighborhood and if he saw anything wrong he'd hit a kid in the street.

So Father Heaney would hit you if you were acting up?

Yes, and if he saw a girl out he'd tell her to get home. Even a Protestant girl, he'd tell her too.

Did you experience any signs of discrimination, since you were an Irish Catholic?

Well in the Village we had the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Congregational Church where the First National is today. St. Gregory's bought the organ from that Church. It is in the upstairs church today. There were about four Protestant churches to one Catholic. The Irish had some trouble in the Baker Company getting jobs. Some of the Yankee Protestants who lived around here were better. One fellow who lived near us, he worked in the mill . . . he would see some work a Catholic man did and undo it to get him into trouble. When a Catholic neighbor died next door to him he said, "Good riddance to the Irish." Don't get me wrong, there were many Protestants who were good people, but many were very narrow minded.

Did this work both ways, from the Catholic side too?

Well, they couldn't afford to be that way. They were looking for jobs. They couldn't let it show, outwardly anyway.

What about the church fire at St. Gregory's; I think it was in 1871? I heard it was lightning.

Well the Protestants burned it down. And when they tried to rebuild it they were threatened and told not to work on the Church. I was told by my father it was blown up by the Protestants.

What about other priests?

Well, I remember Father Deegan in Sunday School talking about the Protestant church. He said "The only thing right about the Protestant Church is the clock and that is wrong half the time."

Father McNulty used to say the 11:30 Mass and it was packed. His sermons were something. He'd tell them what Hell was. Everyone wanted to hear him. He later became the Pastor.

Didn't he build the auditorium?

He built the auditorium and the rectory. Father McNulty showed you where the money was spent. If you needed money he'd help you. As long as it wasn't for booze. He was death on booze.

What was there before the Church buildings went up?

Before the rectory there was two wooden houses. They called them the Seven Oaks. Before the convent was built there were homes. Where the grammar school is . . . it was empty; the auditorium . . . there was a stable.

Has the inside of the church changed?

I can't really remember too much—there have been some renovations, I didn't think there was too much. I don't remember any pulpit. They had electric lights around the poles. Now they are overhead. The Stations of the Cross are new.

Were there any social organizations that revolved around the church?

Well there was the Knights of Columbus, and the Hibernians. They were Catholic but not connected with the church.

Were the Hibernians political?

No, they held dances and socials. They were politically minded but not really political.

What about the Knights of Columbus?

The Knights of Columbus . . . well you had to be a Catholic. But you'll never find out what happens in those degrees. I joined for the insurance.

Where the high rise is in the village, that used to be the car barn for Old Boston Elevated Railway Co. . . . where the YMCA is on Washington Street . . . was a car barn too. It was closed and I went to work at the village one. I got thirty cents an hour in 1917. You worked seven days a week. No day off, no vacation. They could work you 16 hours a day.

What was your job?

I was a conductor on a two-man car. We had open cars and the conductor would have to go up and down the running board to collect the fares. In 1918 they went to one-man cars. The motormen would collect too. We'd go all the way from where the high rise is today to Rowe's Wharf. We followed Dorchester Avenue. There were tracks on the street. In 1918 Broadway Station was built. Then we'd only go that far. It was a good many years before we got to Ashmont.

What about the other tracks today at Milton Station?

That was the steam train. The next station was Ashmont. It was the New York-New Haven Railroad. You had two ways to get into Boston. The steam cars or the street cars. On the street cars it only cost five cents. You could go all the way to Everett for a nickel.

Back to the Church, what about the May Procession?

I remember one in particular, where in the middle of it Father Dolan took ill and died. He collapsed in the park. It would have been about 1943, I think, you'd have to check the date in one of the parish books.

THE BLACK CHURCH IN BOSTON

If there is one institution that has kept black American communities thriving and surviving—it is the black church.

The black church is the only continuous cultural and self-controlled institution that blacks in Boston and the nation have been allowed to have as their own. It has always been the center of the black struggle for self-determination.

The churches in Boston's black neighborhoods during the past 200 years are examples of those religious pillars of strength.

Through the years, black people have lived in virtually every section of Boston. There is no better way to follow this movement of a people than to follow the flow of the black church.

Twelfth Baptist Church on Warren Street in Roxbury is a good example. It's mother church was the African Meeting House built in 1805 on the north slope of Beacon Hill by and for free blacks. All during the 1800's just about all of Boston's black citizens lived on Beacon Hill in the shade of the State House.

This first black Baptist church was the center of the political, social, educational and economic life of the early small black community. It was prominent in the antislavery movement and was once known as the Abolitionist Church.

In 1840 a split occured in the membership over whether the church should be involved in political agitation against slavery. Those interested in political activity broke away and started their own church. This group remained on Beacon Hill and set up its church on Phillips St. where it remained until the early 1900's. From 1850 on through the Civil War years, Twelfth Baptist played a major role in harboring and protecting fugitive slaves in Boston.

The black community shifted from the Beacon Hill area to the South End and lower Roxbury at the turn of the century. By 1905, eighty-five percent of the Twelfth Baptist's members were living in other parts of the city and so the church moved too. Under the leadership of Rev. Matthew Shaw, Twelfth Baptist moved to a building at the corner of Shawmut Avenue and Madison Street in Roxbury which was by then the center of the black community.

The African Meeting House group also moved in 1898 from Beacon Hill to the South End-Roxbury community. It merged with two other small churches in 1915 and is today, People's Baptist Church on Camden Street. In 1898, the Meeting House was purchased by the Jewish community that had moved into the West End and the Meeting House served as a synagogue until 1971 when it was purchased by Boston's Museum of Afro-American History.

During the 1930's and '40s and '50s Boston's black population grew and expanded into upper Roxbury and Dorchester. And the church followed. Twelfth Baptist moved to larger and more adequate quarters to its present site on Warren Street in Roxbury.

Youth at Twelfth Baptist interviewed two of the senior members of historic Twelfth Baptist—Mrs. Cora Herndon, the oldest living member of Twelfth and Mr. John White, the church historian—about their church-community life in Boston.

MRS. CORA HERNDON
Age 98

Where were you born and when?

I was born in Oxford, North Carolina in 1881. That's right, that makes me 98. That makes me the oldest living member of Twelfth Baptist. I didn't go to school like you children . . . in my day you had to pay. You didn't have free school. You had to pay the teacher and you had to buy the books. My father was making twenty-five cents a day working and he couldn't afford a dollar a month and to buy the books.

When did you come to Boston?

I came in 1899 and got married in 1900. I went first to the Union Baptist over in Cambridge.

What kind of transportation did you use to go to church?

By bus. I took my children, my four little girls and we'd go over to Cambridge and stay all day. They had Sunday School in the morning, church in the afternoon and church at night. We used to stay in church all day. Back home in Oxford we did that too.

When you came to Twelfth Baptist who was the minister?

Reverend Shaw. Reverend Hester came after that. The church was on Shawmut Avenue when I joined it.

In the early 1900's what was going on in the church?

We had a lot of what I call Twelfth Baptist feed outs. They liked to eat at Twelfth Baptist–suppers and parties.

What was the black community like in the early 1900's?

Oh, it was different from now. They were more sophisticated then. They were more down-to-earth.

Did the Twelfth Baptist associate with other churches?

Not so much. I don't remember much association. I remember Reverend Shaw saying before he died how he hoped people wouldn't drape in black at a funeral. Everybody wore black at a funeral. And they had funerals on Sunday.

What church events do you remember?

We used to have picnics. The different churches used to rent trolley cars and picnic together. I used to go to Cambridge on the trolley and join others there. There wasn't cars then. They had the open trolley cars. They had just taken off the horse-drawn cars when I came in 1899. They had horse cars on Beacon Street and Mass. Avenue. They took horse cars off and put in rail. So in July and August all the black churches would meet and we'd go to Salem Willows and have a big time. The gamblers would come down and shoot crap. They'd make themselves some money–yes they would.

Did you have prayer meetings?

Oh yes, every Wednesday night and everyone would turn out. At Oxford they used to have Friday night meetings. Wednesday night was for old people and Friday night my brother and I would go. My brother used to pray; I'll never forget the prayer he used to pray, "Oh Lord, I come to thee as an empty pitcher to be filled. . . . ."

Were there programs for youth?

Yes, there used to be Christian Endeavor. The church had programs for the elderly. They had outreach—but not as much outreach to children and college people like they do now.

Were your children actively involved in the church?

No. I used to take them all the time, to Sunday School. The way I brought my children up—I took them until they were old enough to decide for themselves. And when you decide for yourself, I demand nothing. You make your choice. I took them to Twelfth and they didn't have to stay if they didn't want to. You know what I mean. It's like a bird. When you get your wings, I let you go. That's the way I raise my family. Teach you, respect you, I keep you 'till you get old enough to understand.

MR. JOHN WHITE
Age 62

Where are you from?

I'm from Boston. I was born in Everett and raised in Boston. I was in school from kindergarten all the way through high school in Jamaica Plain. I lived on the Jamaica Plain-Roxbury borderline. The house I left I lived in for 45 years.

How long have you been at Twelfth Baptist?

I believe I entered Twelfth Baptist in my mother's arms. And that's a long time ago.

What is your involvement there?

I'll start and go back. At the present time I'm with the nurses unit. I'm on sabbatical from the Trustee Board. I sing in the choir, the large choir. I have been in other positions. I've been president of the men's fellowship at least four different times. Then going way back, believe it or not, I was president of the Baptist Youth Fellowship. I used to be superintendent of Sunday School when I was younger. I also taught Sunday School. It wasn't as sophisticated as today.

What major or historical events has Twelfth Baptist Church been involved in?

Well, I've seen a tremendous amount, and to bring you in, I think I'll go from the beginning up to the present. You don't know too much about the past. My father was a Bostonian. He was born in 1890 and raised on Joy Street in the West End. My father and grandmother belonged to Twelfth Baptist when it was on Beacon Hill. Our family goes back to the beginning in the church. . . . We don't have any actual proof but we believe my grandmother was one of the original members. Of course you didn't ask me my age. I presume that isn't too important. If you did, you would see the wide gap. I will be 62 this December the 23rd and I try to act like I'm forty. So that makes three generations—so you see we go back pretty far into the church. My grandmother was not active at all, just a member so I couldn't give you any information on my family's part. My father became more or less active when the church moved to Shawmut Avenue. And that's when I came to the church.

Was the African Meeting House the only black meeting place?

The only place that blacks had at that time was the African Meeting House. It was built for the sole purpose that blacks would have a place to go for entertainment. The meeting house was used for such things as plays, church service, anything that we wanted to do.

We had a lot of very influential people and during my era when I was young, I remember great big large limousines arrive at church. They were chauffeured. Twelfth Baptist had a tremendously large following group, despite the fact that there were other churches. And dipping back further into history, at one particular time . . . it had a larger audience than Tremont Temple and Park Street.

Do you know how many?

I don't know offhand. I'm in hopes to getting back to forming a group to get into the history, getting into it properly . . . I do have a few books on Twelfth Baptist. There are several books. Here's a book . . . it never became too popular. They decided for the 1945 anniversary–a group of people decided to get some sort of a book together. And they had a real difficult time, like any group. They did a lot of research and there was a school teacher, Crosson, who really got it coordinated, and my father, who was a deacon of the church, Johnny White and the clerk and Deacon J. Reilly, and the late, famous Dr. James Lesueur. . . . They worked very diligently for the material in this book. We have some of them left down in the vault. What this book does, it goes back and gives you excerpts of Twelfth Baptist and here is the pictures of the first church after they left the meeting house. Then it goes on to the second church on Shawmut Avenue. . . . Then from here they bult this attractive church. When the negroes moved out of an area–always on the go–they found out that the West End was becoming populated by Jewish people . . . that's when they moved to the South End. At Shawmut Avenue is where we had the big pipe organ and the whole bit. It states here that "the first church was at Celtic Street," which is now Beacon Street. And then they went to Phillips Street, and then from Phillips Street they went to Shawmut Avenue, and from Shawmut Avenue to present site. We had a lot of problems. People wanted to go one way and another. But through God's hands we did get to Warren Street. And the late Dr. Hester–he passed away at that particular church–and there was a period of touch and go as to who would be the minister–but Reverend Haynes worked right along within the structure of the church and should have been and was the person to lead us. And you see a lot of new things since he's been in.

We have heard of Shawmut Church. Can you tell us something about it and its problems?

I was sort of young then. I didn't see problems if there were really problems . . . well let me put it this way . . . this might amuse you. When you were young and you went to church you were only to be seen and not heard. And when you were very, very young you didn't move at all . . . and the minister was preaching, . . . and in those days it went till . . . dinner. And if the babies cried, the ministers would give them a sort of a look and the mothers would get up and take them out. You never clapped if there was any sort of good music or anything, you waved your handkerchief. That was the church. You just didn't do things like that. Very few people even said, "Amen" except the deacons who had the "Amen corner" up front. And they never dispensed with those seats. It was sacrilegious to sit up there. The deacons were there and they all had to be old and stern. There was no such thing as a young deacon, no sir. As for problems, I can't think of anything that was a large problem. I never did get involved. I think I came in the era that formed the first youth choir and that sort of perked us up. And then other churches formed youth choirs. It was quite the thing to go from church to church and sing music.

I went from one choir to the next. The funniest thing was that when you left the youth choir– you got to be too old to be a youth– you could not join the senior choir. There was a very select group belonged to the senior choir. And Deacon Morris–who just left the Trustee Board–

can tell you a great story about the choir. Because they let him in just by the grace of God. Eventually I got into it but not right away. Yes, we were the youth choir at Shawmut Avenue and we used to have our rehearsals in the middle of the week. Then we thought it really was a big thing—we got invited to the Black Church out in Woburn, Winchester or Medford. We didn't make any long, sophisticated trips. That was unheard of.

Was that the first youth choir in Boston?

Yes, it was. I told you we had many first in Boston. We had the first Negro youth choir at Twelfth Baptist in the City of Boston.

Although we, . . . there were interesting people in the church. I remember when the late Reverend Sahw was the minister, prior to Reverend Hester being there. I remember him and his wife and his daughter. His wife played the organ. And of course Friday night prayer meeting, if you had 6—10 people there it was great, none of us went. Not that we would do anything out of the way. It was just older people. I wasn't out in the street. I was raised very strictly in a Baptist family. I couldn't go to the movies. I don't go to the movies today.

You couldn't date?

Not till you were 16. You couldn't smoke till you was 21. But we had everything we wanted. My father provided for us very well. I was very lucky. We came through the depression as a middle class black family because my father worked in the Post Office, a government job. I used to go to the riding academy when I was young. I had little breeches, the whole outfit—no dungarees. I didn't even know what dungarees were. It was that kind of an era. I was the third black in high school, Jamaica Plain High School. So I was a novelty. My friends were all white. The only time I had communication with blacks was when I went to church at Twelfth Baptist, two nights a week. And before that I went to Boy Scourts and that's the only communication. Then I'd catch the trolley and come out to Egleston Square. Between Dudley Street and Egleston—that was all white. There was only one street that was black and that was Exchange Street. We were always surrounded by whites. I would communicate with blacks on Wednesday for choir rehearsal and then on Sunday. They all lived on Shawmut Avenue, Hammond Street, Windsort Street, up and and down there.

Mr. White, what were the social changes that went on in the church at that time?

Well, they had a lot of clubs and the clubs were very meaningful to the older people. The youth didn't have anything, as I said, except on the Sunday night. The church was not open for activities the way it is today. I mean, you might have one or two activities during the week and that was it. They didn't have any activities, although the church doors were never locked. It's kind of hard to believe nowadays. At Catholic churches the doors were wide open. They always had candles burning on the altar all night. . . . You went there for meetings and lectures. The biggest thing we had going for us were the picnics. Now I might talk about the picnics because they were really something. The very first picnic I can recall I was among the kindergarten age. Mrs. Claussen, she goes to our church now, her sister, Viola Claussen, was in charge of the kindergarten. And I can remember taking our hands, two by two and going across the street, up Hammond Street to Douglas Square . . . and from there all the way down to West

Springfield Street were street cars, with signs on them for all the different churches. Twelfth Baptist had their cars, Ebenezer Baptist had their cars.

You mean all the churches got together for one big picnic?

On the third Thursday in July, every black person in Boston and throughout suburbia met at Salem Willows. So that you started out in the morning and when you got there, there could be over 100 street cars coming in from all over. This was the biggest thing in our lives. Now I have tried to trace that street car around and I get lost. Down Tremont—it was an open subway system to Stuart Street. It went underground there. You know the set of tracks that go inside at Boylston Station, they came out at Tremont Street. We came in there and then to Park Street and then continued on to where Government Center is. Switched off to the Brattle Street cars into the North End and then you went into the tunnel and up into Maverick Station. That's where the blue and white lines run now. When you got to Maverick you switched again and rode all the way through Revere into Everett, into Malden and then into Salem and down to the Willows. And everybody had a basket of food. That was the biggest day of the year. There you met people you hadn't seen since last year. And this really was where the black history of the whole area was talked about. The families got together and the kids got together for the entire day.

Was there competition between the churches, like games?

No, not when we were very young. It was just a big fun thing. Like a great big huge family. Then in time churches started to leave it, because it got to be too much. The churches started going off on their own. Eventually the activities came to our church, and the picnic became a secondary thing.

What were some of the changes that Reverend Haynes made?

He made us aware that young people were human. They had a place in the sun too. Prior to that, you went to church, you had a good time but you just weren't involved in anything. Well, the group of people on his peer level became sort of important when he became the minister. They had a chance to start working on things. They had come out of this type of atmosphere. Church was pleasant but it was more reverent when I was a youth. You just didn't do this or that, you—it was very traditional. You just didn't get up and do things, but we just changed with the times. I guess all churches today have come along with the times and changes. Our church was the first for getting the youth together—getting them off the streets. When Reverend Haynes started, he wasn't too well liked by some of the other ministers. Even today he isn't because of his concern for young people. And there are still some elderly people feel that he is too concerned. But you know it's a tragedy when you can't think of the future. But activities started when he first came into the church. He changed the older people, got them more relaxed, to get them more involved in things. "Hey, let's get together and paint OUR church." That's when they started to do things. So it brought a togetherness.

Was there anything like the social action committee?

Oh, no, no. I can't remember anything like that . . . there might have been some . . . other people might come along and contradict what I'm saying. But anything as outstanding as that, no.

You talked about Dr. Shaw?

He was also a professional doctor of medicine. His family is still alive, we have members in our church. I'm sure they would have some of that information. Unfortunately the information on Reverend Hester went to Newton Theological Seminary. . . . I have to rely on them.

I have one last question. Can you compare the church of yesterday with the church of today?

The church of yesterday was a very stern, quiet church, not knowledgeable other than its own. Each church and its family lived within themselves. But today's church and we are talking about Twelfth Baptist Church, is a very liberal wide open community. It belongs to the community. It is bringing God's word to the community. . . .

EAST BOSTON

East Boston was originally Noodle's Island, the largest of five Boston harbor islands joined together with landfill to create East Boston as we know it today. Its social history began back in 1833 when the first ferry boats began crossing the harbor connecting the Boston mainland to the island. Today it is connected to the rest of the city by two vehicular tunnels and a subway train. The ferries stopped running in 1950.

Street names tell us that what is now East Boston was founded and settled by old Yankees. But today it is a largely Italian community with small groups of Irish, Scandanvians, Hispanics and Blacks.

During the 1850's and 60s the Irish arrived. They provided the unskilled labor that built the East Boston piers and its railroad system. Anti-Catholic discrimination kept the Irish from the skilled occupations and they turned their energies to politics and the church. The Kennedys settled in East Boston and this is where Joseph P. Kennedy was born and raised. In 1844, the Irish established the first Catholic Church in East Boston. Sacred Heart Church built in 1873 was one of several churches built in these early years.

Between 1885 and 1915 the immigration of Italians and Russian Jews doubled East Boston's population. Land and real estate speculators sub-divided houses into apartments and filled in wetlands to build single family houses. East Boston became an ethnic enclave whose residents had an aggressive approach to life that countered the community's poverty. By 1905 the Jewish community in East Boston was the largest in New England. This population declined as the Jewish moved to Roxbury, Dorchester, and Chelsea.

A few Italians lived in East Boston in the late 1800's but it was from 1905 on that large numbers arrived. They came from the North End and were joined by relatives directly from Italy. By 1915, Italians formed a significant part of East Boston's population.

East Boston today is a vigorous community of hard-working people in many neighborhoods. Family life, religious life, social clubs, and outdoor recreation have been the backbone of the community. In the 1960's the expansion of Logan Airport absorbed East Boston's famous Wood Island Park. The loss of this recreational open space in a crowded community, isolated geographically from the rest of the city, has become a symbol of the injustices suffered by East Boston in the name of progress.

Sacred Heart Church in East Boston has been serving the community since 1873—first the Irish and later as it does today the Italian community. The people whose oral histories follow are members of the Sacred Heart Parish.

MRS. ANNETTE COMMUNALE
Age 76

Where were you born and when?

I was born in Italy in December, 1903, and from Italy we came to Boston when I was 3 years old. I've lived in East Boston--almost all my life. We moved to Shelby Street from Princess Street and I went to the Noble School across the street and then from there I went to the John Shever School up to the 7th grade. From there I went to work for Hood Rubber. I was about 15 years old when I went to work because in those days you could work when you were 14. Then you had to go to school only four hours a week until you were 16 years old.

We worked a full work, in those days. Things were hard, and my father had a large family, I'd make $11.00 a week in those days and I'd give it all to my father because he had a big family. We'd never spend the kind of money the kids get today. We never even got a dime to go to a movie. I never knew what a show looked like, cause my father was strict and didn't want us to go to a show. As I got older, my sister-in-law and I would sit on the doorsteps in the summer and talk. We never even went anywhere, never, we couldn't go. Once in a while on Sundays we'd used to go to Wood Island Park. It was beautiful over there before. It wasn't like it is today. We had a bandstand there. There was swimming, kids would play ball. It was a beautiful park.

Before they took all the houses for the airport there was all nice little stores selling hot dogs and ice cream. It was nice all along Neptune Road. It was the only kind of recreation we had and we enjoyed it very much. That's all we had.

When I was 17 years old I got married and I moved to live in the South End with my mother-in-law on Washington Street. Once a week we'd go to a movie house across the street--had a nice little "stage" show. My Jimmy and Rose were born there in the South End and then my father-in-law and my husband bought a house in Medford. Houses in those days were expensive, we had a two-family house, and we had the house for about five or six years. Then the Depression came and we couldn't pay the mortgage. Everybody lost their homes in those days--during the Depression. Then from there I came to live in East Boston again--because my father-in-law and husband couldn't keep up the houses cause they had lost their jobs, they were shoe workers. All the shoe factories went out on "strike" in those days and nobody could find a job--nobody. All the shoe factories closed down. People didn't have no money. We couldn't pay the rents--everybody was losing their homes in those days. So we gave up the house, because we couldn't pay the mortgage--they took it over and then my husband and I, we found a house here in East Boston, that's how we came back to East Boston. A friend of mine lived on Utah Street, Angie her name was, she lives in Winthrop now. She told us about four rooms near her house. So we moved there from Medford, four rooms we had and still we couldn't even pay the rent. My husband couldn't find any work at all. My husband had to go on welfare and that's the time my Connie was small and she got the "chicken pox". She was sick and I couldn't even call a doctor--so a nurse came to the house from the clinic in East Boston.

They used to come around the houses–and I told them I couldn't afford a doctor–no job, and so she was the one who told me to go down to the Welfare Office. When my husband came home and I told him that, he was ashamed to go. He was so ashamed to go on welfare. But everybody was on welfare. So, finally after borrowing money from my father and brother and cousin, he went on welfare. It was terrible to live in those days–you kids just don't know.

In those days if you had an insurance policy, you had to sell your insurance policy before you could get any welfare aid. They put my husband on welfare–and had him work three days a week for $13.00 a week. They used to send him into the tunnel to wash tile, and to clean the Boston Common. He had a long stick with a nail on the end of it. He used to pick up all the papers and keep the Boston Common clean. He had to work just to get those $13.00. In those days food was "cheap" and you could get a nice bag of food for $3.00 a week. Today that bag of food costs about $50.00. Not only that but it was so hard to live in those days. They shut my gas off and we didn't have gas to cook with. I used to use wood in my stove. They started putting in oil burners with a tank in the back with oil–you shut it off and on. The oil flowed in like gas. Well I had a cousin who put in the oil burner in for me. It was so good. He didn't want me burning wood in the hot summer.

When my Connie was little my next door neighbor and I, we'd put our babies in the carriage and go to Chelsea. On Williams Street there was a meat store. I used to buy "one thick pork chop" just to get some free soup bones to make soup for Monday. That's how bad it was during the Depression. Today it's beautiful, in those days we had to struggle. I had four children and we had to get along on $13.00 a week.

Then from the $13.00, he used to be ashamed to be on welfare anyway–we had to go down to welfare and stand in line for milk. I used to send Rose and Connie down, and they were ashamed to stand in line. They'd give you oil and my husband used to be ashamed in line for the oil for the stove. Then in another place they used to give you clothes for the kids, blankets, sheets, flour, apples, bananas, and beans, cause you couldn't buy'em. That's how I come to make baked beans on Saturdays. They'd give you lots of beans. I'd make homemade noodles, apple and homemade macaroni cause I had to use up the flour. I used to make everything then cause we had to. And still with that $13.00–we couldn't pay not rent, that was $16.00 a month. If you brought food and a little something for the kids–that $13.00 was nothing.

Then my husband got a job in the cotton mills making $14.00 a week, a dollar more than welfare and so he got off welfare. He had been dying to get off of welfare. Then he got a $2.00 raise to $16.00 and things got a little better. And then a friend Mini called me to go to work. I didn't know if I should since my youngest Connie was still in kindergarten. My mother-in-law used to live next door. My friend came up to see me and I told her that Mini wanted me to work see, she said, Well you know Easter is coming, why don't you go to work so you can buy your kids their Easter outfits. So I said o.k.–and first it was Easter outfits, and then came the Communion, then

confirmation, then came the graduation. You couldn't stop working then. Every week that pay was good. I worked five and a half days a week for eight dollars. So with Joe's fourteen dollars and my eight dollars, gee, that was a lot of money. But still it didn't go a long way cause I had to buy suits for the kids and dresses for the girls for communion. Then I couldn't stop and I'm still working. I've been working for 40 years now.

So that's the way it was in those days—very hard to get along. But it got a little better and then my husband got a few more raises in the cotton mills. Then he got a job in electronics and we started doing a little better.

Then my kids started to go to work and I was working. Now today its nice, it's good. We got a TV and everything. So that's my story.

MR. PETER CERNADA
Age 66

When and where were you born?

I was born February 2, 1913 on Lexington Place, East Boston.

Were your parents born here?

My father was born in Spain. My mother was born here. My father came here when he was young. He thought it was an opportune place to come to. He had gone to pre-med school in Spain. When he decided to come here, he came as a fireman on a boat. And he came here and looked around for work. He did some part-time teaching in Romance languages. He taught Spanish and Italian, French and Portuguese. He also worked part-time interpreting in the courts. He worked for the immigration service. Then took up barbering part-time. Eventually he bought a barber shop on Commercial Street and Fleet Street, in the North End. He had people working for him. Then he gave up the barber shop and went to school. While I was in high school he was back in medical school.

Did your mother ever work?

Yes, she worked part-time while he was going to school. She worked nights cleaning; she worked as a matron--the New England Telephone I think. This was a period of three or four years. School was very expensive.

What type of house did you live in?

I don't remember what I lived in when I was very young. I went down to Morris Street, across from Sacred Heart School. It was a three decker which my uncle owned. That was one of the reasons we moved. He had an empty tenement and it was right across from where I went to parochial school.

So you grew up mainly by Sacred Heart?

Yes, that's right.

How were the neighbors?

Neighbors? They were very, very friendly. Well, you knew everybody on the street. Well, you know Morris Street, from Putnam to Brook Street. It was quite a diverse neighborhood. There weren't too many Italians at that time--mostly Irish. On the street I was on, to give you some sort of a rough idea--on the end of the street was Sam Fine, who was Jewish, there were the Levines, the Cohens, the Edelmans--they were Jewish; and there were the Kelleys, McGuires, Doherty, Finn, White, Walker, Mitchell--just some off the top of my head, which isn't easy. There probably were two Italians. They are still around these parts. The neighborhood at that time, I would call, certainly not middle class, I would call it lower middle class--all working people. Mostly, they created large families on the street.

There were mostly three deckers?

They were all three deckers. Some of them were duplexes. The house next to me was a controversy some time ago about a fellow opening a shop down there...Sam Fine was in that spot for years. He also had a plant on Briemen Street where he made these cement columns for buildings. He also had his junk business down on Morris Street. It was a fantastic neighborhood. Everybody got along. The kids would fight a little. Everybody was a working person. I can think of some of the older people that were there for quite a number of years. I don't remember when my uncle bought the house but he never lived in it. He had property on Liverpool Street. He had property at one time on Princeton Street. He had property all over the city...

One of the things I remember, it's kind of funny. Kids today don't know. We used to take all the empty soda bottles around and cash them in. As a matter of fact we'd look for any bottles around the house or any neighbors who had bottles. We would have that money to go to movies. We didn't have extra money. Those were some of the things we did. Well, as a matter of fact, I sold Saturday Evening Posts. That was years ago as a kid. I helped sell papers on the corner. There was nothing like a paperboy going door to door. What would happen is you'd be on a corner, I was on the corner of Marion and Bennington Street, with a fellow with papers. It reminds me now when I see the corner of Marion and Bennington Street, the type of people we had growing up. You could leave these papers for two hours and people would leave their money for the papers. You could actually leave the thing alone, it would operate itself. You just had to be there when they brought the papers. Nobody would steal a paper on you. It was actually unbelievable that you could be off and leave it. And Saturdays, there were a number of Jewish people around there. I had a route Saturdays—I'd go around lighting their fires. They couldn't do it. They were Orthodox Jews. They wouldn't strike a match, so Saturday mornings I had a regular route lighting the fires. I got 10 or 15 cents.

You said you went to Sacred Heart—did you go from kindergarten through eighth grade?

Yes. As a matter fact, Sacred Heart at that time, the pastor was Father O'Neil. I think we were the last graduating class that he had, I'm not sure. I wasn't around much after that. I went for a short time to East Boston High. One of the things about the elementary school, the classes weren't mixed boys and girls. We were the first class that was co-educational. It's kind of ridiculous. To show how things have changed. I used to write left-handed. I still am left-handed. I write with my right hand. What the nuns used to do, to show how times have changed, they used to tie my left hand back in the seat so I had to write with my right hand. That was common practice. There was something sinister about being left-handed. It wasn't anything these nuns created. They were brought up that way and that's how they felt. So they tied my hand. And I write right-handed but I do everything else left-handed. They were gung-ho about that.

Another thing, I lived right across from the school, talking about how strict they were—we had the police on the street. Of course living across the street from the school if you did anything wrong, there was what they called the hat trick. First thing the cop gives you a kick in the pants. If you went home and said anything to your mother, you got a beating there and if the nuns found out about it you got it three ways, no matter what happened. The best thing was not to say anything. That's something you don't see today. A cop wouldn't put his hand on a kid today. They wouldn't think nothing of giving you a kick. They wouldn't hurt you, just the point of the shoe in the seat of the pants. Today if a cop did that he's in trouble. We called it discipline, but possibly today they would call it brutality.

What kinds of jobs were available to those who didn't finish high school?

Well, you have to remember there weren't many jobs. When I finished high school that was just about the time of the depression. So there weren't many jobs. But strange as it seems, I worked many part-time jobs. I know I worked for Elco Cigar in the summer. One time I worked in the laundry truck—that's when they had laundry delivered door to door and wet wash. I worked with the ice man. All these delivered door to door and didn't work for like the Edison Electric Company. They weren't hiring to that extent. Those who were hired got in there through somebody they knew. Jobs were scarce. This was right at the depression. Things didn't start to pick up till about '40 or '41—about the time of Pearl Harbor. That was back in '28, '29 there wasn't that much work. Talk about the Italian women—not to get off the subject of work—the Italian women would go out, you'd see them with their long dresses and bandanas and they had baskets on their heads. They'd go picking dandelions, they'd stay out there all day in the hot sun.

Where did they pick them?

Well, there were fields. East Boston had many—it isn't like it is today. Part of the airport, up where Suffolk Downs is, all that area. There were open spaces and the dandelions grew wild and they picked them. You'd see them with big baskets they carried on their heads. They would probably push you right into the ground. That was something from the old country.

What did your parents think of education?

My father was gung-ho on education because he had had one and naturally my mother felt the same way. He tried every way—even later in life he tried to get me to go to college. When I was 25, 26, 27 he was still chasing me to go to school, take up a course to do something. But by that time I had finally gone to work, I was doing pretty well. Of course, later I got married in, as a matter of fact I had an anniversary yesterday. I have been married 42 years. We were married in 1937. My father was very strong on education. He taught in prep schools. He taught Roman languages. He was very well educated.

Did he teach you any languages?

Well, as a matter of fact, as far as Latin went, when I was in there I was very proficient because he helped me. That was the only language that I spoke. As I say, he was a Spanish immigrant but Spanish was never spoken in the house. The only language was English. I heard Spanish spoken once. He had a relative from Pennsylvania come over who spoke it and he answered, they had a conversation. But other than that English was the only language spoken. On the street, whatever you were he spoke to them. If you were Italian, he spoke Italian. Matter of fact they were very surprised someone could speak all these languages. He could speak every one of them fluently. He had this barber shop in the North End. He didn't spend too much time there but he'd go in and talk. He'd work maybe a couple of hours. He had other things he was always doing. He hired these people to work for him. Matter of fact I used to go there and shine shoes and pick myself up a few bucks.

What religion are you?

Religion--Catholic.

Were your parents active in politics?

No. Matter of fact they didn't think too much of politics. That was a general trend then. I think if there had been more politics, I think they would have been better off. They were interested in pursuing the family life and politics had no part of it. Today, it's different. Today I think it's better, they should be interested. I don't think we'd have any trouble with airports if they had been interested.

Did you walk to the stores for shopping?

We walked all the time. Matter of fact when I moved out of East Boston when I was older, I loved to walk. I used to walk from East Boston to Somerville twice a day. I went over, came back for dinner, went back and came back at night. We walked almost everywhere. And if you went in town, there was the North Ferry and the South Ferry. We always took the ferry. Matter of fact the man next door, Mr. Sheehan, was a deck hand on the ferry. On the ferry you see horses. Very seldom would you see automobiles until later.

How long was the ferry ride?

It would seem like no more than ten minutes.

How often did it run?

Quite often. What would happen--it would come in and there would be one on the other side. It would load up. As long as it took to load up--15 to 20 minutes at the most. Once the deck hands secured the boat, you got off and the others immediately started to go on. And it would go back again. If I were to venture a guess I would say 15 minutes.

How much did it cost?

A penny. I think it went up in later years. But I'm sure it was a penny. I know it wasn't over a nickel but I think it was a penny. It might have been two pennies. I used it frequently. Matter of fact, even later when we did part-time work, we'd look along the docks, these fish houses along Atlantic Ave., and we'd work there maybe one day or a few hours, we'd go back and forth on the ferry.

How much did it cost to go on the trolley car?

I'm almost sure it was a nickel.

And you rode the narrow gauge railway?

Yes, and I think that was a dime. You got on that down near the end of Jeffrey's Point. Then you got a boat to what they called Rowe's Wharf. That was almost beyond State Street, and South Station. It was about a block from South Station and State Street.

Do you remember Wood Island Park?

Do I remember Wood Island Park! I think that was one of the saddest things when we lost that park. It was a fantastic park. I don't know how many acres. They said it was 68 acres. It seemed like it was all of that. We could come in either from Prescott Street or Nepturne Road. If you came in on Prescott Street there was a foot bridge where the narrow gauge went underneath. There was a store on the right-hand side where you bought all your pop and ice cream. Families would go there on a Sunday night and it was nothing to see 100 families there, spread out with their blankets and there were two bathhouses nearer the Jeffrey's Point side, still closer to Prescott Street than Jeffrey's Point. There were two bathhouses—one for males and one for females. There were attendants there. And you could swim all day and go up on the hills. There were grass and shade trees. And between Neptune Road and there, were four baseball diamonds. One wasn't too good, the other three—one was very good, with all the popular semi-pro ball clubs. We didn't have as many big league teams—it was more semi-pro teams. At that time there was the House of David with beards. Beards was very unusual at that time, so when they came out it was kind of innovative, really. Then there were the Colored Giants. They were all black. They were a very good team. Matter of fact one of the things I remember is that we played football on one of the fields—there were two fields and on the newer fields we would be practicing. I'll never forget one day I was playing and I was running out for a forward pass and a plane came right over my head and landed right by the goal post. It was a forced landing. It was a small plane. There were about nine people in it. And they all got out and hugged the pilot. He come in over trees and landed that thing. We were playing and we were ahead. Something else I witnessed seeing from the side of the hills by the airport—two people had to make a forced landing over the narrow gauge and there were wires above. They couldn't make it to the airport, but they landed in a little body of water that's no longer there—it's been filled in. It probably would be where the airport station is, maybe a little this side

of it. And the two people in this plane, naturally there were two, I remember the fireman picked one of their heads out of the water–they were naturally killed. But I'll never forget–it was an awful thing. They were decapitated. I saw the whole thing. I was sitting on the side of the hill. It was a fantastic park and they had a quarter of a mile cinder track to the left of the diamonds. And I only recently told somebody that we used to play volley ball–fifty years ago. And they said that volley ball wasn't in existence. I said "Don't tell me. I played it there." We set up our nets and everything and played. Then in the winter they froze in that area for skating. There was a big field house just the other side of the enclosure and the gate on the outside where the ball park was and everything. And there was so much area where you could spend a day of passive recreation. I would take a lunch. My mother would give me a sandwich and I would buy pop. We didn't bother with milk. We would be gone from seven in the morning to maybe six at night. We had to be home for supper; that was the only thing. And they always knew where you were. You didn't have to leave the park. You had everything in there. I think it's the worst things that ever happened, that they took that park away. They could never give the people anything in place of it. Everybody went there. As a matter of fact they had clam bakes there at night. Wood Island Park was such a recreational part of East Boston that it's hard to imagine that it's not there. Fourth of July–when they gave you ice cream and had all different kind of games, like potato sack races.

Did your family have a favorite spot?

Yes, yes. The favorite spot we always thought was–as you came in off Prescott Street –there were usually the same people, that's why it was favorite–was on the right hand side, right near the bath houses. It was well shaded. You would try to get there early because it would seem to be a better spot. More or less the same people would gather all the time. In other words, these people would look for one another. All the people from Chelsea Street, Briemen Street, Marion Street, all that area would gather so you would look forward to seeing them.

Like all the Point people would be together?

Usually, although there was no restriction. You see these people every day and you spend that time with them. There was no Saturdays off. Everybody worked Saturdays if they worked. Even the people I knew. There wasn't any 40 hour week. So Sunday was the big day, unless there was a holiday, Sunday we would go to early mass and from there we would go down to the park.

What kind of food did you bring?

Oh, boy. If you went there it would be like being invited to an international banquet. Portuguese people would bring linguisa, the Italian people might bring meatball and pasta, the Greeks–there weren't many Greeks–but there were some, the Jewish people would have their own food. It was nothing to go there and share food. You took enough for your own, but it would not be unusual to share somebody else's food. There were some Nova Scotia people. As a matter of fact on Morris Street where I lived there were quite a few of those people.

Was there a place where the young men would take their girl friends?

Oh, yes. Along these paths there were benches and the people sat there. And of course there were the sloping hills. Romance certainly wasn't stopped.

What kind of music did your parents listen to?

Well, my father loved music. Matter of fact, I wouldn't hesitate to say that we probably had the first pianola in East Boston. People would gather around my house when it was being played. One of the things he had and I think it was an attraction for the Italian people, were the operas. Big records and he would play them like *Carmen* and all the operas and they would be listening. We also had popular music. Not like the popular music today.

Is that what you listened to as a teenager?

Oh, I listened to music, everybody listened to music. Fortunately, I say, we had access to those rolls, to that kind of music. We had the operas and I got to enjoy them after listening all the time. Most people don't care for the operatic music, but after a while you get used to it.

How much spending money did you have?

I think I had as much as anybody. We didn't get too much, but we enjoyed what we had. If I make sort of a guess, if we got 75 cents a week it was a lot of money. Yes, that was a lot of money. You don't know what you could buy for 75 cents.

Can you remember any particular people who influenced your life?

Yes. I don't think they were too successful. There's quite a few that I listened to. I think possibly some of the nuns, believe it or not could talk to you. There were a few, probably a little beyond the time they were in, they could talk to you and tell you what to expect. They were very sharp. There were some of the younger priests. There was a Father Linehan who played football with us and let us tackle him. That was almost unheard of in those days. You shouldn't do that to a priest. He would defy you to tackle him. He wasn't very big. . . He'd hit you or anything, just to get you worked up so you would. And we had, of course some of these priests. That street I lived on, in the yard, there was a Father Burke that I remember. I'm sure his name was Burke and he played baseball for Holy Cross and they would be down there. One of the priests would be pitching to him. And the nuns used to walk up and down in that yard. They never went out. They never went outside. They walked in pairs and sometimes in threes and they walked up and down and up and down.

So you would say the church was important?

Oh, yes, yes. That parish is gone now. There was the Holy Name, which is still there. In fact, I belonged to the Holy Name when it first started . . . I never went back to Sacred Heart for the simple reason I couldn't get there Sundays. I worked Sundays. The church did have a big effect on the people, possibly a bigger effect

than you realize. I haven't smoked in 42 years. I've tried to get my wife to stop, but I can't.

Are you pleased with the church today?

I really don't have any hang-ups with the church today. I don't say it hasn't changed. Some of the things I was at first reluctant to accept but now—they have to stay with the times. Let's face it, all churches are having a problem, to be realistic. If they are having a problem they have to conform, really. They don't have to go overboard. But if you had told me I could eat meat on a Friday! God, if you had accidentally touched a piece of a hot dog on Friday, you went around with a guilt complex for six years.

Do you think East Boston as a community has changed?

Oh, yes, definitely. As a community, I think that it has changed in that it is more activist than before. I think it is the most active community in the whole state.

Do you think it is for the better?

I do, I do. I've been involved in a few things and I know it is.

Do you think family life has changed?

Certainly it has to change. Things have happened so the family has to change. Kids are dating at 12 or 13, there are drugs, there is more permissiveness. Naturally it has to change.

How do you feel about politics?

Politics? Well, it's a necessary evil. I like to get a hold of a politician when he's doing something wrong and let him know it.

Do you think if something happens in another part of East Boston it would affect you?

Yes. There were people who went to Wood Island Park who didn't live near the Park and now it's gone. You could say that the airport is a Jeffrey's Point problem, but it isn't just Jeffrey's Point problem. The same planes are coming over Eagle Hill. You find that they can bother you as much. The decibels, the sounds, can bother you all when the jumbo jets go over. Had we been more interested earlier we wouldn't have had the problem. I think Massport today is a little more aware of the people. It's been brought about by activists. Other than that I don't think it would have happened. People were at one time so apathetic, so complacent—that's what happened. Now, it's not too late. East Boston has a lot to face.

BOSTON'S EARLY JEWISH COMMUNITY

The development and growth of the Jewish community in Boston parallels that of other American communities. The largest immigration of Jews to America (therefore Boston), was spurred by the massacres of thousands of Jews in more than 150 Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe, beginning in 1881. East European Jews already living in America sent glowing letters to their landsleit (people from the same country) describing American life, and a tremendous exodus began. In the twenty years between 1875 and 1895 the Jewish population in Boston jumped from 3,000 to 20,000. In the next seven years, the Jewish population grew to 40,000 and by 1907 there were 80,000 Jews in greater Boston.

This wave of Jewish immigrants joined the earlier immigrants who had settled at first in the North End. The Jewish area was bordered by Hanover Street on the southwest, Endicott on the west, and Prince (later Sheafe) and North Bennett on the northeast. The North End's Italians, Irish, and Jews each lived on their "own" streets. Immigrant life was difficult and living conditions poor.

The Jewish immigrants, however, developed a community life that was strong and varied. In the area of religious life, synagogues were established and built, and with the growth in the community, there was a growth in the number and size of the synagogues of different ideological learnings. A specific Boston feature was that they became known as "Temples." In the area of Jewish education, schools of various Jewish ideologies were founded and grew. And in the area of charity, the Boston Jewish community established refugee aid, hospitals homes for the aged and orphans, a free loan society, vocational school and other institutions. Boston pioneered and set an example which was emulated throughout the country when in 1895 the Federation of Jewish Charities was established.

The following interviews give us some of the flavor of Jewish immigrant life.

MRS. ROSE WHITE
Age 79

Where were you born?

I was born in Veleche, Russia. It's been 66 years since I've been in the old country.

Did you go to school there?

To get into school you had to know your A,B,C's, you had to know how to read, otherwise you couldn't get in. So I was lucky to be taught and was the only girl in our Jewish town that went to school . . . I went to school two years and then we came to this country. My grandfather was a bookbinder and he picked out the necessary books.

When did you come to the United States?

We came to the United States when I was 13, in 1913.

How did you get here?

We came over by boat . . . took trains to various cities . . . and came here to Boston.

Was the United States what you expected it to be like?

Kind of, yeh. It seemed big, perhaps because I was small . . . at that time everything was big! Of course everything was set-up before we came . . . my parents were both wise . . . and I started school right away.

What kind of school did you go to?

A neighborhood school . . . I went into the eighth grade in five years.

Was the school mainly of Jewish kids or did the Christian and Jewish kids go there?

Oh my goodness, yes, public school was like anywhere else. We learned English you know for the first time . . . three little girls came along and they were talking and of course I couldn't understand a word and so discouraged and my teacher said, "Don't worry about it. You'll learn how to talk it . . .", and in no time at all, I learned English.

What languages did you speak?

We spoke Russian and, of course, I spoke Yiddish, but I learned English in no time at all.

Did you have a main synagogue that you went to?

Oh, yes. Nothing like the temple now. It was a shul . . . and we went to Hebrew School too.

Were you Orthodox?

Yes. I was very Orthodox. Up till the time I was 16 years old I never lit a match; or I never ate anything but Kosher food. My father was very Orthodox, very religious. My mother was religious but not in the fanatical sense.

Were there any special family customs that you had?

We used to all get together on Passover. We had everybody in the family, as many as 45 people and they would come after work and my mother and her brothers and sisters, each one would take a turn every year. They used to buy a whole case of eggs . . . my childhood was really enjoyable.

What were your grandparents like?

Well, my grandparents were left behind in the old country. My grandfather, I would call him a saint . . . very Orthodox and very knowledgeable. We lived with our grandparents. Every morning he'd say his prayers and read the bible . . . I don't know about other towns, but in our town they were having meetings about how to overthrow the Czar . . . there was also a jail in that town . . . that was how it was . . .

What sort of work did you get involved in when you came here?

My father used to make these hanging pots and copper teapots—anything that was copper. He came here, five years before we did, and got any work he could in order to send other family members to the U.S. . . . like painting anything he could get . . .

Did your parents have any language barriers when they were working?

No, they didn't. My father spoke English before we came here. My mother learned to speak English, in fact she spoke English without an accent, which wasn't too bad. We were a very close family. My mother's family . . . we were together on holidays . . . this day and age everyone is always out . . . we formed clubs of those who came from Velecha. They were called *Landmarschaften*—immigrants frequently formed clubs and mutual aid societies of those who came from the same town and province in Eastern Europe.

We'd always get together. All the relatives were very close . . . before all the Jewish people wanted to be together, live together. We lived there a long time and then there was a big fire in one of the apartments and we moved out . . . to Dorchester. And from 1913 we lived in Dorchester and my mother lived in an apartment for 37 years until she died.

Were there any Jewish newspapers?

Oh, yes. There were *The Tag* and *The Forward* . . . American Yiddish language newspapers.

Were they separated into Reform, Conservative and Orthodox newspapers?

No, of course each newspaper had their own ideas . . . I used to read the newspaper to my mother because I could see better than she could. And oh, they used to have love letters . . . and all this business . . .

How did your family survive the 1929 depression?

Well, I'll tell you. We were never rich, but we were never very poor. My mother was a marvelous housekeeper and a marvelous cook and we never felt the depression. We were lucky. We thought we were rich because we had a lot of food, nice food, and my mother had a very clean house, so everything just went the natural way. Of course, it was very hard making a

living. It was very hard. When I say poor, there wasn't much money. But it seems my mother, she made everything do. None of my friends had money and used to come to our house to enjoy the festive cooking—like *homentaschen* (a special cookie for the holiday of Purim). I still continue with the customs, although I can't say I really believe in it.

How were you affected by the coming and the arrival of the State of Israel?

Oh, I'm very happy about it. Very happy. I belong to the Haddasah, a women's organization and we try to do whatever we can. In fact . . . Beth Israel Hospital and Brandeis, etc. are all through the efforts of the little old Jewish ladies who used to put five cents or ten cents in the *pushky*. A *pushky* is a tin charity box immigrants would have in their homes to collect donations for charitable causes. Well that's the way the Beth Israel Hospital originated. I remember the first time when the hospital opened. It was not the hospital—only a two-family house! And that was the start of the Beth Israel Hospital. One man, and he was a big doctor, he was the one who worked . . . and all the old Jewish people . . . they're the ones who worked at it. It't the eighth biggest hospital in the United States. . . .

What do you think is in the future for Jews in Israel?

I just hope that things straighten out for them. It's not going to be peaceful . . . more killings . . . I hope that if there is a God that he will have mercy on the Jews for a change . . . It's time . . . let them stop suffering the way they are. . . .

MR. LOUIS KAPLAN
Age 71

First of all, when did your ancestors come over to the U.S.?

My father came in 1898, to Boston. He was Orthodox. My mother came over here a year or two later. My father brought her over. They lived in the West End of Boston . . . in those days it had a very large Jewish population. He was a tailor by trade. I was born in 1908. When I was two years old my parents moved to Arlington and opened a tailor shop there. The *Shul* was located at the Arlington–Lexington line on Sylvia Street. The Jewish community consisted of 30 or 40 families all living on Sylvia Street–a lower middle class congregation.

How old were your parents when they came over here?

That's a tough question, because where they came from in Russia there were no birth certificates, no records. So to find out what age each one of them was, was just a guess. Even when they died, we didn't know just how old they were. We just had to guess. My father got his citizenship papers in 1924 and according to the papers he was 42. My mother was considerably younger, but just what it was I can't say.

How did your family educate themselves?

Both my parents could read Yiddish and Hebrew. They could speak Yiddish and Russian. As far as American English, they spoke broken English and as the years went by their English improved, but even so you could tell by listening to them that they weren't born in this country.

Did you ever encounter prejudice?

I'll tell you. This may be hard to believe. At no time all through high school did I ever hear the expression "dirty Jews." In other words, they tolerated me, but I was never invited to their homes. It didn't bother me, so I didn't invite them to my house. It didn't bother. There weren't very many Jewish kids in the class. I think in the whole senior class there were about three. As I said they tolerated me, I tolerated them.

I have some questions about your family life. What is your full name?

Louis Kaplan.

Do you have a Hebrew name?

Label . . . it's a Yiddish name.

Do you know the origin or meaning of it?

No, I don't. Jewish people name their children after members of the family who died, immediate relatives who have passed away. What it means I don't know.

I was wondering if your name was changed at Ellis Island.

No, not as far as I know. I realize a lot of names were changed, at the whim of whoever did the interview for different reasons. As far as I know this particular name was not changed.

Where was the old country for you?

They came from a small town called Zaslav in the Ukraine.

Were any family traditions passed down?

Well, I don't know. My family was Orthodox as far as religion. They had a few superstitutions, mostly my mother. But that was characteristic of most of the people from Eastern Europe. A lot of the religion in those days was based on superstition. My mother and father were both honest people. They had to struggle. Most of the Jewish people in those days did have to struggle. They had to make a living and overcome prejudice. They came here with nothing and it's remarkable to see what came out of that nothing. They were a typical Jewish family. I have a brother. They were interested in educating both of us, so we would have a better life than they had. That's the only way I can answer it.

Did any historical events in Russia affect your family?

Well, my father left Russia in order to escape the draft. In those days a Jewish boy was drafted at the age of twelve or thirteen to serve in the Russian Army for 25 years. In order to get out of that and rather than to hurt himself physically, as a lot of them did, he just left home. At an early age, he was an apprentice tailor . . . and he earned his passage to this country.

I have some questions about religious or neighborhood life. When you were in Boston was there a place of worship?

Yes. I know they had shuls and synagogues. There was no such thing as a temple.

To give you an example, this may be farfetched as far as your question is concerned. My father having a tailor shop, it always bothered him that he couldn't go to services on Saturday. They had difficulty getting a *Minyan*, a quorum of ten men required for prayer together on Saturday, but they did scrape ten men together. It really bothered my father that he had to work on Saturday and couldn't go to shul. Finally one Saturday he got mad. He closed the tailor shop and dragged me with him to the shul. We got in and sat down. Services in those days were all conducted in Hebrew. I sat there and I was getting bored. I didn't know what in the world was going on, I couldn't get interested, I'd yawn and my father would give me a book and say "Read here." I'd just been Bar Mitzvahed. And I'd read and my mind would wander and I'd almost be falling asleep and he'd shake me. "Read here." I was still inattentive and he dragged me out of my seat and into the center aisle, and giving me a great whack across the face—in front of the entire assembled congregation. The congregation added to my humiliation by saying "Good, good, that's the way to bring up a son."

What a way to discipline a son! How different things are today! No wonder that I lose interest in Hebrew at that time.

We had a Hebrew School in a small room in the Shul. We sat on hard benches and had to purchase our own books and supplies. Tuition was one dollar a week. The members of the school committee had to collect the tuition money by going door to door once a week. Heat was furnished by a small wood burning stove.

Kids then weren't much better than they are today, they raised hell. They hired this young fellow who graduated from Harvard. He was a Palestinian. In those days there was no such word as Israel—it was Palestine. He was at graduate school in Harvard and he came out every day and

taught us Hebrew. Twenty-five dollars a week they paid him, I remember. And there was an old, old man named, "Old Man Dickerman." He took it upon himself, voluntarily, to supervise the school. He had a great big stick and he'd sit there. If you didn't pay attention, he didn't hit you with the stick, but a desk right near you, he'd go wham. That was the Hebrew School I went to. And once you were Bar Mitzahed you were a Jew. You were all through. You were 100 percent Jewish . . . boy did we cause that guy trouble! . . . Once we almost burned the shul down. Kids weren't much different than today . . . kids—what can you expect? . . . That's about it as far as religion is concerned. That's all I can remember.

Were there any cultural groups within the synagogue?

There were religious parties sometimes. If someone married off his daughter and had enough money, he invited the congregation to the wedding. That was as far as the social life. There wasn't much. It was just hard living. You had to go out and make a living. And being a Jew, and competition being what it was, you had to be twice as good to get half as much. So Sundays, you were too tired to have social functions. But holidays, they'd have a show downstairs in the shul, . . . and they had different speakers come and talk in Jewish and Yiddish. That was about it.

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